An Anthropology of Waste: The University of Texas's Zero Waste Goal

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This is an examination of how we define waste and, subsequently, how waste is used as a weapon by the power structures in place. First, this paper provides a definition to the broad term "waste" and continues on to examine who creates these definitions, who these definitions aim to serve, and how these definitions affect people. I argue that there is a link between race, socioeconomic standing, and one's visibility of and proximity to waste. I take these ideas and situate them within the city of Austin and more specifically at the University of Texas' home football games. My research looks at the zero waste policy being pursued by Texas Athletics and who shoulders the burden of such an ambitious goal.

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Chapter 1

Methods

Conducting Fieldwork

During one of my first weeks at the University of Texas I found myself in a classroom with a group of other freshmen. I was with my FIG, or First year Interest Group, and for our weekly meeting our mentor decided to bring in someone living the zero waste lifestyle to talk to us. As she explained how she made her own mascara, had to give up ever purchasing bags of chips, and showed us a year's worth of trash in an exceptionally tiny mason jar, I was shocked. Previously, I was blind to this term, this lifestyle, and now someone proclaiming its ease was right in front of me. Deeming myself to be environmentally friendly I decided I could eliminate the trash I produce as well. I rushed back to my dorm, ready to purchase the essentials—a mason jar seemed to be vital—and begin a new journey, but I quickly realized this was not going to be an easy, or cheap, transformation. I surrendered any ideas of going zero waste after an hour of research.

After delving into the zero waste portion of the internet it became clear that the zero waste lifestyle is a privilege that some had the time and money to undertake, and which I, a poor college student in a dormitory, would struggle to maintain. I had no access to a car in order to drive to a zero waste or bulk grocery store. The mental picture of me carrying dozens of heavy glass jars on the city bus to get food every week seemed laughable. Upon watching 'a day in my zero waste life' videos on YouTube I also realized that for the people in the video this lifestyle was the main focus of their day; they had little time for anything else. When was I to write my essays and exercise and get eight hours of sleep if I was making my shampoo, toothpaste, and makeup to avoid plastic packaging?

Deciding I could not be zero waste at this moment I pushed the term to the back of my mind to save for a later date. Then, a few weeks before the start of this project, I became aware of the University of Texas's zero waste goal after an acquaintance mentioned a volunteering opportunity they participated in with their organization. They explained digging through trash bags and sorting waste with Texas Athletics Sustainability in order to gain money for their group. As someone who frequently participates in park cleanups, I decided to look further into this chance to volunteer.

Upon looking into this, I was greeted with numerous articles from our campus newspaper, The Daily Texan, which explained the purpose behind these large scale trashsorts; Texas Athletics Sustainability was trying to reach the zero waste goal in place for the University of Texas. I had never heard of such a goal, and after asking many of my friends, neither had they. Harkening back to my freshman year I felt I had a pretty good grip on what it meant for an individual to be zero waste, but I had not heard the term employed on such a large scale. I was suddenly filled with questions on how this goal was going to be achieved by the entire university, why it was being pursued in the first place, and why I hadn't heard anything about it.

While searching for how to volunteer I also realized that Texas Athletics Sustainability had open positions to be an intern. I quickly applied, stumbled through an interview, and became a Sustainability Student Intern. Thanks to this position, I was allowed to conduct research from the inside. I became an active participant, a worker, in the home football games trash flow. Every game I would go to my station around the stadium—where exactly this was changed—in order to ensure fans knew what waste went into which bin and to help the custodians get the trash out of the stadium without interfering with the fans. The day after the game I would report to a parking lot full of dumpsters in order to train volunteers on how to sort trash into the various waste streams in an attempt to minimize what was going into the landfill.

During these two days I was able to make observations, ask questions, and interview the other workers, my fellow interns, and the volunteers. In total, I talked to approximately 25 workers, 10 interns and supervisors, and over 30 volunteers. On the one game I didn't have to work, I went down to Bevo Boulevard, a place in front of the stadium where pregame activities take place, and talked to 15 fans in a semi-structured interview format asking questions about waste, disposability, and the goal in place. On this weekend I was also able to walk around, making observations from a fan's outsider perspective. Thus, backed by textual analysis, I was able to conduct my research through observation, semi structured interviews, and unstructured interviews filling the role as both a worker and a Texas football fan.

Chapter 2

Discard Studies

Defining Waste

Discard studies is a growing field, one that explores the link between humans and their waste. Scholars of the field—Mary Douglas, Sarah Moore, Zsuzsa Gille—believe that by examining our trash we are really examining ourselves. Our trash cans and landfills show many elements of our lives: our economy and shopping habits, our diets and the decline of home cooking, the ability for some countries to ship their waste to others as a representation of power, the list goes on and on. As this field of study continues to expand, more connections are found between people and what they dispose of and it is widely held that waste, trash, garbage—whatever one may call it—affects the globe. From the economic, with trade deals to determine waste flow, to the environmental, wherein humanity faces massive amounts of pollution in the face of global warming, everyone is affected by waste, albeit in different ways. While previous research articles tend to focus on one or two aspects of waste, this paper acknowledges a wide variety of links while also thinking about zero waste and waste in the setting of special events (i.e. football games) rather than just in the everyday. In doing so, I argue that proximity to a visibility of waste is indicative of socioeconomic and racial privilege and that how waste is imagined and created is a product of the capitalistic power structures in place. This thesis will explore the multitude of effects discard studies have unearthed in the context of football games at the University of Texas, but first, we must start with a definition.

Waste is not the same for everyone. Here the common monicher "One man's trash is another man's treasure" comes to mind, and this hackneyed expression does hold true. For example, when conducting my research during a trash sort at the University of Texas, some

student workers found unwrapped bananas someone had disposed of and decided to keep them and take them home. What someone deemed waste and threw in the bin became a snack for someone else. The term waste—and by extension, garbage—is a common word and yet one that is difficult to define due to its sociocultural creation. While it is important to remember that waste is a cultural construct in part determined by economic status, one must not let the ideological shield from the physicality of waste.

Waste is irrevocably physical. Its ability to take up space transforms the area it inhabits and the people it is associated with. Waste produces 'wastescapes': locations that are entirely indebted to waste and whose sole purpose is to be the space on which there is waste. These wastescapes are largely what we know as landfills, although this term also comes with great variability from state to state, country to country, and region to region. While often located away from city centers and hidden from view, these landfills must be placed somewhere. Often ending up in disadvantaged communities, landfills/wastescapes' physical attributes unequally affect these underrepresented communities, a topic which I will further discuss later in the paper. Nevertheless, how close one is to waste's physicality can easily change one's perspective due to a different lived experience.

How waste is defined in the context of our cultures and experiences does have an impact on others as, for instance, one may even go so far as to categorize certain peoples as waste or a 'waste of space'. So too does the physicality of waste have the ability to act on others, albeit in a different way. Waste—especially in the context of landfills—can produce hazards as noxious chemicals seep out of mountains of discarded materials. I also encountered waste's physical effects conducting research at the University of Texas. Volunteers helping sort trash the day after football games would often get light headed due to the combination of Texas's late summer heat and the horrendous fumes of decaying waste. Face masks were handed out to

those wanting to combat the fumes.

In the face of such factors, I argue that definitions of waste must include both the sociocultural underpinnings of waste and the physicality of waste itself. It is as Stefania Gallini succinctly put: “Waste is a hybrid, both a sociocultural artifact and a physical matter. Its existence depends on a culturally based decision entangled with biophysical features and technology arrangements upon which the transformability of waste depends” (Gallini 2016). If one wants to examine the full work that waste does one must consider both sides of the story.

Perhaps the most influential definition is the one provided by Mary Douglas, who wrote that dirt—through extension and for our purposes, waste—is “that which challenges and reaffirms a given cultural system” She also wrote that dirt/waste is “matter out of place” (Douglas 1966). These definitions and characterizations are ones I find useful in that they acknowledge both sides of the spectrum. The first part of this definition is fitting when arguing as to why people choose to engage with or own certain things while considering others to be taboo. For example, there are types of meat that Americans will not eat while other cultures consider the same product to be useful. In accepting the idea that dirt is “matter out of place” I argue that one must first recognize that there is a system of power in place that decides which elements are to be rejected and deemed to be “dirt”. Dirt cannot be understood in isolation; it is understood in relation to the imposed systems of power. It is the rejected, the inappropriate, the oppressed (Liboiron 2019). I add this caveat to Douglas’s definition in order to urge readers to understand that trash and waste are the product of decisions made by those in power. This will prove to be helpful when looking at The University of Texas’ zero waste policy; the university classifies waste and to whom it is visible.

Following a similar train of thought, Sarah Moore defines waste “...as that which disturbs or disrupts socio spatial norms” (Moore 2012). Waste gets in the way of the system; it interrupts

a smooth order. It has the power to disturb at both a surface level, insofar as people are disgusted by public trash cans and landfills, and at a macro level, disturbing entire social orders. Thus, the University of Texas goes to great lengths to ensure that waste is made to be invisible during its home football games; fans are not to be disrupted by waste. Sociocultural standards, set by those in power, are in place to define where waste should be—out of sight and out of mind, that is—and when it refuses to succumb to such a notion the norms are disrupted.

Moore's definition, broad and delightfully abstract, is one way to go about defining something so subjective in nature. Other discard studies scholars, however, prefer a simpler approach; one that is straightforward and focuses more on materiality. Take Gille's definition: "any material we have failed to use" (Gille 2010). Perhaps this definition is an oversimplified one, failing to acknowledge or allude to the power relations, ramifications, and affects this term can create. Yet, Gille, looking at waste through a Marxian lens, argues that a broadness is necessary to avoid creating a division between consumer and producer. Again, waste affects everyone, but some more so than others. With this caveat, I am not sure avoiding such a division is a positive because both groups are part of the system, and waste does not exist without a system in place to classify it as such. Where I do agree with Gille is when he makes the point that garbage can metamorphosize throughout its lifetime, changing from one group to another. I harken back to the aforementioned example of university students finding bananas in the dumpster. The bananas were a product to be sold to fans at the football game, then became waste due to their placement in a marked receptacle, and then emerged from such classification in their removal from the dumpster and perceived value by the students. The bananas entered and exited the category of waste seamlessly. Herein lies the value in the uncomplicated: keeping a simple definition allows for understanding of waste's fluid nature. I believe this is a good definition to remember when moving forward because of this important attribute of waste; it is transient and

used in a multitude of ways by the various power structures in place.

Or take Hawkins's definition of waste: "discarded, expelled, or excess matter", another elementary way of framing the term (Hawkins 2006). In fairness, Hawkins does elaborate and mentions that this definition does little when trying to understand the "anxieties" that waste can bring about. Designations such as this provide a great description of the *what* but leaves out the *who* that waste is inevitably tied to. Put another way, waste collects among specific groups and peoples due to the structures of power in place and this definition seems to ignore that fact. Waste is more than assemblages of items we no longer want; it is a powerful, ever changing, tool that can influence attitudes and challenge sociocultural norms. Waste can be used as a powerful weapon by those in power to suppress those in weaker positions. Put another way, where waste ends up and who faces its toxic physicality is decided by the influential (e.g. The University of Texas). In understanding this, I turn to thinking of waste as more than just a singular item, but, rather, as an entire category and force.

Garbage, a seemingly common, everyday thing is more than just what one throws in their household bin. Mazzolini and Foote seem to understand this, writing that:

> Garbage is not just unused raw material, nor is it merely what something becomes when it is used up, nor does it only describe something once whole that has decayed or been broken. Garbage might best be understood not as an object but rather as a category, and it comes into being only at the moment when it is thrown away, when no other apparent use can be found for it. And yet no matter how many ways we experiment with how to define it—and virtually every book on garbage begins with a meditation on how to construct a definition—we are less interested in such definitions than in how and why they are deployed by different people along with how those definitions are pressed into the service of larger projects, ideas, and disciplinary commitments (Foote, Mazzolini 2011).

In sum, garbage is a variety of items and the importance should not be entirely on the item, but on who, why, and how these items affect the people they do. To disagree with the authors, I do find value in exploring the multitude of definitions on the subject as they provide an important

precursor when looking at how the definition is utilized or "deployed". Before analysis of how waste is used by those in power can occur one must consider different opinions on what waste even is. In doing so, one gains insight into people's conceptualization of the term, a vital part in grasping how this word will then be transformed into something that those in power use as a weapon to impact the disadvantaged.

Chapter 3

Environmental Racism

Linking Race and Waste

One of the best ways to study and understand waste is to examine it through the lens of those most affected by it. Waste is a powerful tool; it can be used to create new stereotypes or reinforce old ones. Obviously, some are more affected by how powerful entities use waste to create such harmful ideas about people than others. For this reason one must consider a waste narrative based on the perspective of the affected—minorities, impoverished peoples—as well as the privileged.

While conducting my fieldwork at the University of Texas football games, the division between the affected and the privileged was striking and startling. I had hypothesized that economic standing had a great effect on who trash affected and was visible to, but the racialized aspect of this quickly became apparent as well. I witnessed people of color in janitorial uniforms pushing gondolas of trash while the majority of those sitting, laughing in the stands appeared to be a completely different demographic.

This connection between waste, race, and class is an interesting one to examine. These connections, in part due to institutional racisms, seem circuitous and never ending. To explain, people in poverty or a low socioeconomic class tend to be minorities. These minority groups then make up the majority of the workers in the waste industry (the focus here being on those physically involved with the waste, excluding management positions and related jobs in the waste management sector). For example, 60% of private waste haulers in New York City belong to minority groups (Zimring 2018). Additionally, the vast majority of those working with trash at the University of Texas—outside of the student workers—chose to identify as a nonwhite race. These minority groups are further devalued due to their association and proximity to garbage.

Here we harken back to Douglas's connection between waste and dirt. Dirt is waste and waste is dirty. By association, those dealing with waste are 'dirty' as well.

Those working with trash are linked to trash, the workers seen as dirty and working an undesirable job as a last resort. When leading groups of volunteers at trash sorts I was often asked why I was choosing to partake in such a profession and I was even told "I hope you're getting paid for this." I argue this is one reason fans at the Texas football game refrained from any interaction with janitorial staff; they perceived the trash, and by extension the workers, to be 'dirty' in some way. I believe this example also leads us to consider environmental racism as a whole. The inequality of environmental policy and practice is documented in the historical record and remains alive and well throughout most countries, including the United States. Here it must be reiterated, waste adversely affects minorities.

Austin's History of Waste

The historical collection and placement of waste in Austin, Texas has not been well documented. The city of Austin's website even declares: "There are many closed or abandoned landfills in the Austin area. Many operated before landfills were regulated, and may pose environmental or safety risks. Their boundaries are often unknown or poorly defined" (City of Austin n.d.). Nevertheless, where the known landfills are is unsurprising. Austin has a troubled past regarding segregation, its redlining policies of the early 1900s forcing minority communities to move to the east. While this relocation of peoples and its effects have been well researched, for our purposes it is simply important to note that the result of these policies was a consolidation of the socioeconomically disadvantaged minorities into a single location, making them easier to exploit with the weapon of waste.

With all of the minorities moved to the east side of Austin, often demarcated by

Interstate-35 which runs through the city, the decision on where landfills should be located became much easier for city government officials. The map below makes this clear. The vast majority of the 70+ landfills found in and around the Austin area can be found on the east; this is the same location of the socioeconomically disadvantaged groups. The continued presence of environmental racism in the city is also strikingly evident when looking at the landfills currently in use. Marked in red, these dots on the map reveal that all five of the operating landfills can be found on the east side (City of Austin 2008).

This map, and our knowledge on where landfills are, is largely thanks to a city wide study conducted in November of 1984 by Underground Resource Management, Inc. for the city of Austin. As part of the introduction to this report, URM writes: "During this study of closed landfills and dumpsites by [URM]... 66 sites were identified. These sites range in significance from large landfills or those with known hazardous contents to small recreational trash dumps… It is almost certain, however, that there are small waste disposal sites in and around Austin which remain undocumented" (URM 1984). I find this to be unsurprising, as businesses and corporations in the early 1900s, and arguably to this day, did not want to deal with any regulations or proper waste management when they could simply leave their trash amongst the poor people of color. Thus, it was common in Austin, and across the country, for those with some modicum of power to leave their garbage amongst the unvalued members of society, forging the link between waste, race, and class (Skelton, Miller 2016).

The oldest dumpsite found by the URM report was one that operated near South Congress in 1927. It seems that for a decade or two the city of Austin only had one landfill in operation at a time, but this data should be taken with a grain of salt due to the overall lack of landfill laws and regulations. As evidenced by the graph below, there is a spike in reported landfills during the 1950s and subsequent decades. While the city of Austin credits this to

population growth and increasing urbanization, I also argue that we see more landfills in the written record due to the introduction of the first national landfill legislation in the 1960s (City of Austin 2008).

In 1965, the Solid Waste Disposal Act of 1965 (SWDA) was passed by the EPA. The first of its kind, the SWDA regulated the storage and disposal of waste (US Legal n.d.). Finding it to be quite weak and ineffective, the EPA passed a new law in 1976 called the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA); it is still in place today. This law sets national goals for the reduction and management of waste, ensures "wastes are managed in an environmentally-sound manner", and protects "human health and the environment from the potential hazards of waste disposal" (EPA n.d.). Additionally, the city of Austin began to set its own waste centered laws in a move to be more environmentally friendly. For example, drop-off recycling locations were set up (1970), curbside recycling was enacted (1980), and a zero waste plan was put into place (2009). A full list of Austin's ordinances and their dates can be seen in Figure 3.

As the city of Austin passed these laws and preached community efforts to reach waste reduction goals they left their more vulnerable populations behind. Take, for example, what happened in the early 1990s in Govalle park. Govalle Park is located next to a neighborhood east of I-35 off of Airport and Bolm Rd near Boggy Creek on the East Side of Austin. In 1928, a city ordinance to implement segregation led to the mass migration of black and Latino people to the East Side of Austin, and since then, Govalle Neighborhood has featured a predominantly African American and Latino demographic. However, what was once a quaint area with a happy immigrant community has now become an area dominated by inherent gentrification and environmental hazards.

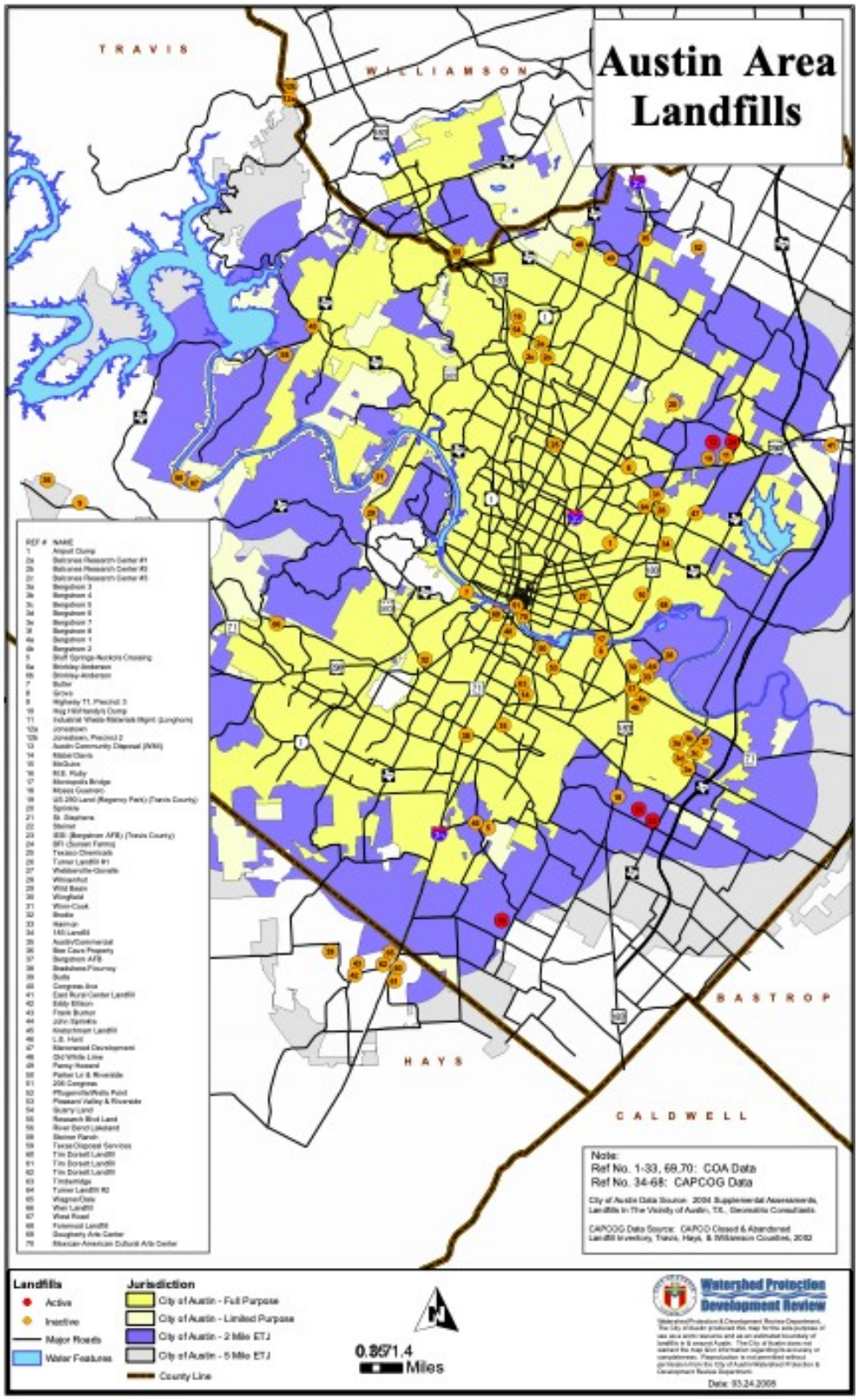

Figure 1: Austin Area Landfills (City of Austin 2008)

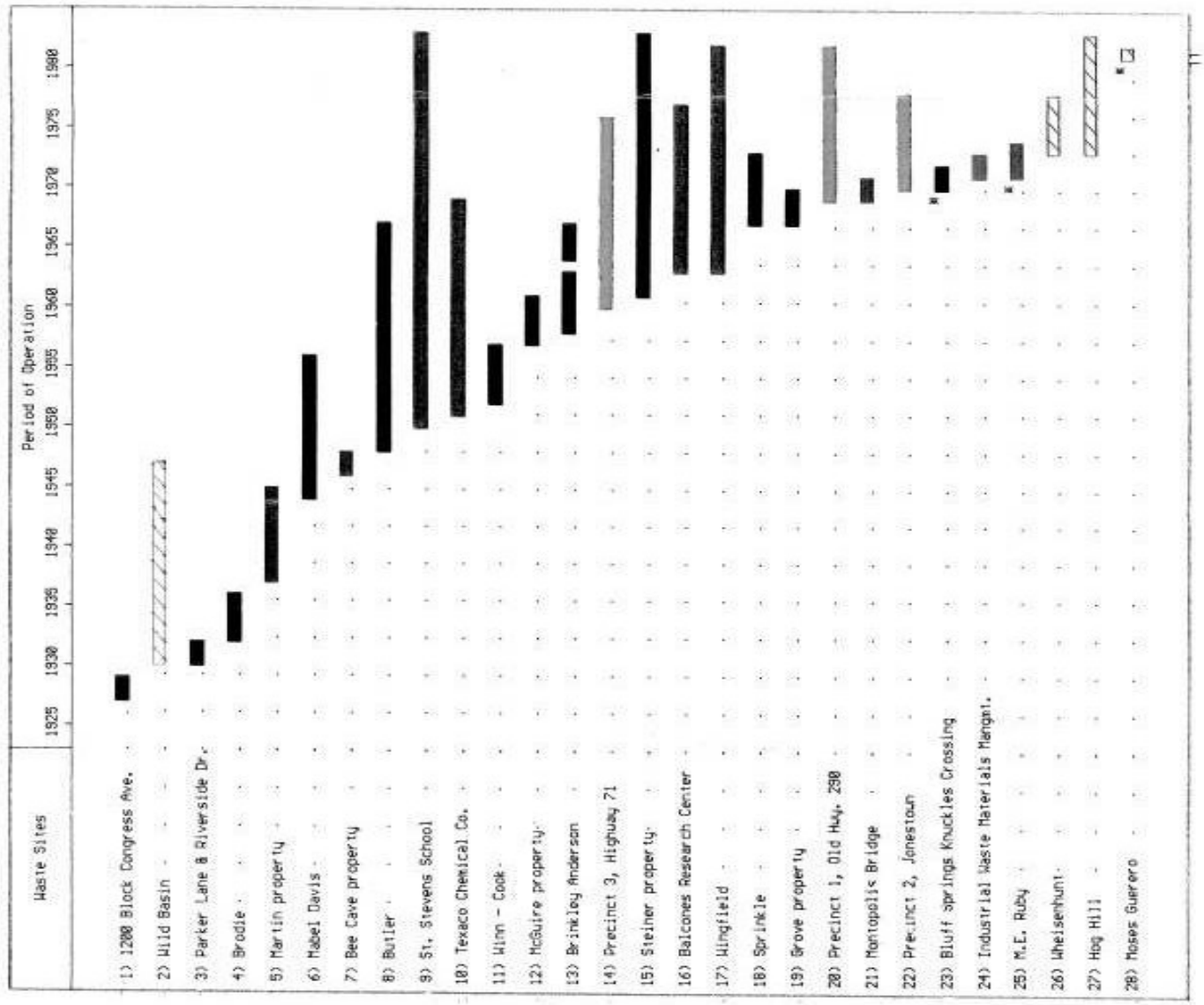

Figure 2: Austin Landfills and their Dates of Use (URM 1984)

Decades ago, several oil companies implemented many tank farms throughout East Austin--one of these being placed across the street from the Govalle park and neighborhood--that had detrimental impacts on both the land and the people in the area (People Organized in the Defense of Earth and her Resources [PODER] n.d.). Tank farms are large containers of petroleum products that can be placed above ground or underground. Historically, they are located in 'underdeveloped' areas of town where land is cheap and where oil companies have more freedom due to the lack of political representation of residents in the area. In the Govalle area, several oil companies including: Texaco, Chevron, Mobil and Exxon were part of this escapade as their facilities took part in storing "millions of gallons of petroleum" (People Organized in the Defense of Earth and her Resources [PODER] n.d.). Unknowingly to most, these tanks began to leak into the soil and groundwater. Inevitably, those living around this area began complaining about symptoms such as headaches, rashes, and nosebleeds. When interviewed, one woman who lived in close proximity to the park even noted that the trees in her backyard died, presumably of leakage from these tanks (Austin History Center 2018).

Additionally, a range of different cancers infected many people, which sometimes resulted in death.

This case example provides a story of toxic waste killing local people. These people were low income minorities who had no say over what was happening in their own backyards. The tank farm was placed where it was because the people were socioeconomically disadvantaged and had less power in the ability to act and create change. While Austin was promoting sustainable, waste reduction programs, it seems that these regulations were meant to serve a very particular subset of the population. While white residents on the west side were greeted with curbside recycling, those on the East found themselves living amongst the waste of those the city deemed more valuable.

Austin Resource Recovery and Zero Waste History

Austin Resource Recovery is governed by the City of Austin Code of Ordinances, Chapter 15-6 -Solid Waste Services. In addition, the following outline illustrates the foundation and structures by which the department operates, based on the policies created leading up the Zero Waste goal.

	1970	Ecology Action non-profit group offered weekend drop-off recycling locations
	1977	City-owned FM 812 Landfill Permit issued
	1980	Began City-wide street cleaning
	1981	Conducted household composting education campaign
	1982	Launched curbside recycling pilot program
Ordinance 880609-L	1988	Replace Citizens Advisory Task Force on Solid Waste Management with Solid Waste Advisory Commission
	1989	Curbside recycling expanded citywide
	1990	Pay-As-You-Throw Program implemented • Free recycling bins for city-wide recycling • Three size options for containers • Service fee based on volume • Brush & bulk collection 2x/ year
	1991	City-owned Household Hazardous Waste (HHW) Facility opens to the public
	1995	Plastic yard waste garbage bags banned
	1999	FM 812 Landfill stopped accepting putrescible waste and started accepting Construction & Demolition (C&D) material
	1999	HHW moves to new expanded facility
	1999	City-owned Materials Recovery Facility (MRF) begins operation
	2002	City-owned Materials Recovery Facility opened to the public
Resolution 20050519-44	2005	Set a goal to implement actions in the UN Environmental Accords, which included waste reduction actions including to develop Zero-Waste strategies, reduce non-disposable toxic waste, improve recycle and composting
Resolution 20070215-023	2007	Resolve to reduce negative impacts of global warming
Resolution 20080410-048	2008	Council adopts a plan for reducing plastic bags entering the waste stream in coordination with the Texas Retailers Assoc.
	2008	Single-stream recycling introduced in Austin
	2008	City-owned MRF stops sorting recyclables
	2008	Solid Waste Services begins the single-stream processing contract with Green Star
	2009	City-owned FM 812 landfill stops accepting C&D material
Resolution 20090115-050	2009	Adoption of the Zero Waste Strategic Plan
Ordinance 20101104-018	2010	Council approves Universal Recycling Ordinance (URO) Phase 1
Resolution 201111215-047	2011	Approves Austin Resource Recovery Master Plan
Ordinance 20120301-078	2012	Single-Use Bag Ordinance approved
Resolution 20120927-008	2012	Council approves URO Rules and Administrative Rules
Resolution 20130425-007	2013	URO Phase 2, Amendments to the Solid Waste Code
	2013	Purchase of Compressed Natural Gas refuse trucks for ARR using grant funds.
Resolution 20140410-024	2014	Set a community goal for net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050
Ordinance 20140612-1010	2014	URO Phase 2 Amendments and Rule Adoption
	2016	Expansion of curbside composting approved in the budget

Figure 3: Austin Resource Recovery and Zero Waste History (City of Austin 2018).

This history of environmental racism continues into the present. Most notably, this occurred—and continues to occur—with the Austin Community Landfill, nicknamed 'Austin's Other ACL' after the famous Austin City Limits music festival. Located on the East side, adjacent to two now unused landfills, industrial and chemical waste started to discreetly accumulate in the area sometime in the 1960s when regulations were startlingly weak and there was no landfill permitting process or requirements. Modern consulting reports show that "Industrial Waste Materials Management was allowed to dispose of liquid and drums of waste at ACL in the 1970's, materials which would be considered hazardous by current standards" (Goard 2019). Then, in 1981, the ACL was purchased by the nationwide company Waste Management, or WM (Mader 2019).

Due to its demarcation as a private company, WM is excluded from any goals—not laws—regarding waste reduction that the city of Austin may have. Based on its increased acquisition and expansion of landfills all across the country, it is quite clear that the company does not hold the same ideals as the more liberal, eco-friendly city of Austin. This is even further evidenced by the failed attempt in the 1990s to expand the ACL. Even now, in 2020, there are moves to continue its expansion despite the landfill's problematic and historically charged location in a diverse neighborhood.

When the modern expansion was questioned by other researchers, WM failed to even admit that the expansion was happening, despite the obvious (Mader 2019). Waste continues to build up in the old landfill, approximately 3,000 tons of new waste coming every single day from "multifamily residential dumpsters, businesses, restaurants, and commercial construction sites, as well as residential trash from smaller communities" and with complaints from over 750 people since 2000, it is clear that the community is still reeling from the negative effects of the waste present, some of it toxic (Mader 2019).

Sadly, these are not stand alone cases. In the United States, race is the biggest factor in determining if you live near toxic waste (Schlanger 2017). Environmental researchers have found "a consistent pattern over a 30-year period of placing hazardous waste facilities in neighborhoods where poor people and people of color live" (Erikson 2016). I believe this waste ends up where it does because of a long legacy of race and class issues in the United States. Where landfills and tank farms and dumpsters are located is decided by municipal governments and local minorities are very rarely part of this discussion. The placement of waste is indicative of race relations in this country as its placement makes visible who we value and who we connect to waste and see as 'disposable'. In its physicality, waste and garbage expose these power relations. Our ideas of what—and who is— waste are brought to light due to its material form and its positioning among specific populations.

Furthermore, as Bullard suggests, industrial firms and companies involved in waste removal "view the black community as a 'pushover lacking community organization, environmental consciousness, and with strong and blind pro-business politics.'" Additionally, "Residents of economically impoverished areas---intimidated by big corporations and deserted by local politicians---were slow to challenge private and governmental polluters of their neighborhoods" (Bullard 1990). Due to the characterization of entire groups of people—minorities—in such ways, those in charge are able to then use waste to affect these minorities in greater ways. Due to institutional and structural racisms, minorities end up in lower-income areas, and government entities prey on this, bringing waste into their communities to infect the people and the cheaper land.

While there are a myriad of health concerns connected to living in proximity to a wastescape, it is also important to consider that the physical attributes of waste, garbage, and landfills—the perceived or imagined smells, 'dirtiness', germs, etc.—can become transferred to

the people within its vicinity. Herein lies a terrible catch-22. Wastescapes are placed in socioeconomically disadvantaged areas due to racisms and biases within our society, and the adjacency of the people in these communities to waste plays into harmful stereotypes, continuing the cycle. In this way waste is able to expose who those in power value; it makes the invisible power relations visible. Simply, waste is found amongst those who the powerful see as less valuable. Then, this proximity and visible linkage between peoples and waste is employed to create harmful stereotypes that become ingrained in the public mind, ensuring that the populus comes to hold the same values as the power structures in place.

There is no easy way to level the playing field in who becomes a target of dangerous waste. The negatives of waste are attempted to be covered up in the name of economic progress. For example, as Bullard describes, "a paper mill spewing its stench and poison in one of Alabama's poverty-ridden blackbelt counties led Governor George Wallace to declare: 'Yeah, that's the smell of prosperity. Sho' does smell sweet, don't it'" (Bullard 1990). For minorities living in a country that seems to value a booming economy more than civil rights, waste is a factor of everyday life, one that drastically affects well-being, health outcomes, and overall quality of life. These case studies and the discussion of waste and race in the United States will serve as an important backdrop moving forward into our discussion of The University of Texas' zero waste policy wherein waste's materiality and responsibility is shifted onto the minority workers so the white, paying fans can have a trash free experience.

Chapter 4

Institutional Sustainability

Socioeconomic Privilege and Visibility

There are those who come into frequent contact with waste and there are those who are lucky enough to be able to throw their refuse in a bin, never to see it again. A large part of this 'luck' comes down to socio-economic status. As aforementioned, this is linked with race, especially in America, but it also serves as an important standalone factor. The typical American, middle class, suburban family's relation with waste—throwing it into a colored bin and placing these bins out on the curb every so often—is much different than what many socioeconomically disadvantaged peoples are faced with.

This same issue can also be drawn out at the university level. Football games come with heavy ticket prices at the University of Texas, even for students. Those that can afford to be a spectator are granted immunity from the waste disposal system. Their only requirement is to throw away their own personal refuse, but even if this norm is ignored someone else will come along to ensure the trash enters the proper waste stream. This 'someone else', from my observations, tends to be a minority working for hourly pay. The burden of ensuring fans do not witness or experience any of the labor of the zero waste goal of the university falls upon their shoulders.

The lack of education in waste management and waste cycles further contributes to stories such as this one. For those powerful and privileged enough to have a routine trash collection service the aforementioned issues go unnoticed. For these people, when the trash is out of sight it is also out of mind; it is no longer their responsibility. Waste is seemingly transformed the moment it is placed in the recycle bins, a haze of hope clouding the reality of where that item will end up (Foote, Mazzolini 2011). Then, due to the lack of attention given to waste due to lack

of visibility, waste is able to accumulate in poor areas, negatively affecting residents. The power structures in place want to make certain groups more ostracized and invisible, but trash helps draw out these structures, exposing them with its visibility and physicality.

Similarly, as I will expand on later, there is a lack of visibility at play at the University of Texas football games. The majority of the waste collection goes unnoticed due its location in the basement of the stadium. Once collected, the waste then gets transferred several blocks away from the stadium, away from the eyes of fans. Those visiting for the football game are kept purposefully unaware of the waste cycle happening around them due to the perceived link that to be near trash is to become trash.

Due to my position as a white, middle-class American the structures of the waste cycle remained invisible to me as well until I placed myself in its workings by accepting the sustainability internship. It is as the common saying goes: 'good infrastructure is invisible infrastructure'. Put another way, if the infrastructure in place (i.e. trash collection) is going unnoticed than it is being successful. Yet, I would like to push back against this notion by calling upon the works of Liboiron and Larken, who urge readers to consider the power elements that reside behind the scenes. Infrastructure is invisible to me, the football fans, and others in similar positions because these are the groups that it is designed to serve. Those that are underprivileged are not given this luxury. The waste cycle is engineered to be invisible only to those that are deemed valuable by the people who hold the seats of power (Larkin 2013). Thus emerges the link between social privilege and who waste is visible to.

Waste Production: Blaming the Consumer

Why do we have so much waste in the first place? Capitalism, and the powerful big businesses that uphold this economic system, are major contributors to the process of waste

production. In the demand for easy, cheap inputs needed to turn a profit, capitalistic companies have shifted from reusable materials to disposable ones. In *Waste and Want* Strasser emphasizes this point by focusing on the bottle industry: " In 1836 Lydia Maria Child advised readers of The American Frugal Housewife to sell bottles back to apothecaries and grocers for reuse...Businesses specializing in used bottles developed during the 1880s in most cities and were thriving by the next decade" (Strasser 1992). Yet, as demand and competition increased and machinery improved, now able to produce items much quicker (such as new glass bottles, or eventually plastic ones), disposable items became the cheaper option. Companies like Coca-Cola led the way, ending the production of their returnable glass bottles in the 1960s and moving to plastic bottles in the 1970s (Coca-Cola 2017).

Despite the large scale production of disposable products created by various companies, the waste burden seems to have fallen onto the shoulders of the consumer. Again, I argue this is because of visibility and privilege, which are linked. In our everyday lives we see people: our neighbors, our friends, people in the grocery store, producing waste while the businesses and factories are left out of sight, often located in rural areas and small towns. To target what we see—the litter outside our houses, the plastic packaging in the grocery store—is much easier than fighting a large corporate entity. This is even more true when considering the economic and political power big businesses and large scale polluters have. They are able to use their influence to push their waste onto others and form the rhetoric that will best suit their interests.

Thus, individuals are targeted for their waste and waste practices. This can be seen in the way most homes have numerous bins: one for landfill, recycling, and maybe even one for compost. The pressure is on the individual to properly sort their waste. Since Austin began implementing waste centered policies, the majority have focused on waste after it has entered the consumers' hands (Image 3). Even in the present Austin and numerous other cities provide

numerous educational recycling programs, community clean-ups, and encourage citizens to survey those around them to ensure they are 'properly' disposing of their items (Hird, et al. 2014). At University of Texas football games, there are also separate bins for the different waste streams, but interestingly no landfill bins are present. Instead, there is a recycling one and a composting bin. The initial sorting of waste still falls onto the consumer (additional sorting will additionally be conducted by a myriad of workers and student volunteers), but this absence of a landfill container alleviates guilt as trash producers feel their waste will get reused and become a new item or usable soil.

Another example of consumers shouldering the burden is the Keep America Beautiful campaign, which focused on the litter of individuals. The responsibility of environmental degradation and waste production was shifted to the shopper and away from big business. Interestingly, these ads were funded by the leading beverage and packaging corporations (Liboiron 2019). By funding these initiatives, the corporations shirked responsibility and put the guilt of waste production onto the shoulders of the everyday American. From their seats of power, big businesses—the real creators of waste—urge consumers to look at where, and amongst whom, waste ends up, rather than looking at where it originates.

This creation of consumer blame and guilt, which leads to the surveillance of others, contributes to a further rift in society. Waste is now another thing to criticize others for. When monitoring trash bins to ensure exiting fans properly dispose of their garbage, I correct fans if something is placed in the wrong receptacle. More often than not, this is met with apology and I see guilt on the patron's face. If they are with company, their friends will often jeer or joke at such a discretion, seemingly criticizing their lack of knowledge regarding waste disposal.

Waste is now an issue of morality. Waste can become a mechanism of guilt when one has forgotten their reusable grocery bags, for instance, and is left with the plastic option. Or, on the

contrary, it can induce self-righteousness in those that carry around reusable silverware and straws and always remember their bags. Judgement can quickly be placed on those who do not act in the same ways. The injection of morality into our waste practices (e.g. saying that littering is immoral as the litterer is not thinking about the future of the planet) also plays into the system as the focus is on individuals and their waste—not the businesses—and it keeps the aforementioned cycle of recycling going (Hawkins 2001).

Yet, not everyone considers waste to be a problem of morality. As Gay Hawkins points out, commodity culture in part frees us from a negative view of waste. Instead, being able to create waste is a privilege; it means you have money to spare. This is a common phenomenon I have witnessed at the home football games. The constant consumption and subsequent discarding is a way to draw attention to socio-economic standing (Hawkins 2006). Additionally, some people change their waste practices only because they have no choice. There are those who would prefer to just chuck all waste into one bin, but risk a fine if waste streams are not properly sorted. In this way, waste is a form of repressive power. Individuals must ensure the correct forms of waste disposal are met because the focus is not on businesses or other entities, but is on them and their waste.

Chapter 5

Zero Waste

In lieu of the poor recycling rates of the United States (and probably heavily affected by the aforementioned campaigns corporations have contributed to in order to produce consumer guilt), some individuals have taken the waste crisis into their own hands, choosing to produce little or even zero waste. However, the term was originally invented by Paul Palmer in the 1970s for businesses. He created the company Zero Waste Solutions to resell chemicals used in production practices to scientists instead of having these byproducts end up in landfills (Kellogg 2018). Yet, in the following decades this term and its responsibilities has fallen to the consumer. Many point to Bea Johnson as the first zero waste home blogger (Chapman 2017). Since then, thousands have followed in her footsteps. There are now over 4 million posts on Instagram carrying the hashtag 'zerowaste' and dozens of influencers continuously pop up on various social media platforms to promote the lifestyle. In addition, quite recently, this term has once again been employed on the macro scale as some companies, universities, and cities—the University of Texas and entire city of Austin included—fight to reach a zero waste goal.

The goal for zero-wasters is to produce as little waste as possible, avoid plastic, and to take part in a circular economy. This idea of a circular economy, or cradle-to-cradle economy, is one where everything produced is getting reused or completely consumed so that no waste is produced (Barks 2019). While the goal of zero waste—reducing what is consumed, avoiding plastics, reusing—is common throughout the practice, how zero waste is defined varies from person to person, group to group.

Perhaps the most common definition is the one provided by the Zero Waste International Alliance, which defines zero waste as: "The conservation of all resources by means of

responsible production, consumption, reuse, and recovery of products, packaging, and materials without burning and with no discharges to land, water, or air that threaten the environment or human health" (EPA n.d.). While this definition is a good one, highlighting the focus on a circular economy, not all zero waste definitions include words like 'all' or 'zero'. For example, most cities choose to define zero waste as having only 90% waste diversion, as is the case with Austin and Oakland (EPA n.d.). This is also true of the University of Texas's zero waste goal. In even lower standards, the label of 'Landfill Diversion' is awarded by Waste Management when an 80% diversion from landfill rate is achieved (Waste Management Media 2018).

With zero waste not even being 'zero', especially on the larger scale, what is the point? Why reduce our waste? Does minimizing waste lower wastes' aforementioned impacts? Well, recycling, especially in the United States, is not where it needs to be and often negatively impacts those with little power to change their situation. Only 9% of global plastic waste is recycled (Jennings 2019), and Bevin Ashenmiller, an environmental economics professor, has found that recycling a piece of plastic waste may actually be worse than throwing it into the bin due to the CO2 emissions released when that waste is shipped to the other side of the planet. As stated, the chance of these plastics actually getting recycled is quite small as well, and when shipped to coastal Asian countries, can often end up in the ocean. There are currently 5.25 trillion pieces of waste in oceans worldwide (Parker 2019). Thus, in going zero waste and subsequently lowering the amount of plastic waste created, I believe there is real potential to lower the effect waste has on powerless peoples and other forms of life.

Proponents of a zero waste lifestyle showcase this aspect of reducing waste as a way to save ourselves from a 'waste crisis'. Other benefits include building community and creating jobs in recycling industries (Toronto Environmental Alliance n.d.). Yet, it is important to recognize that the ability to not produce waste is a privilege and the zero waste movement geared

towards individuals is not accessible to all. Items packaged in plastic, as opposed to glass for example, can often be cheaper, and buying trendy, reusable items like grocery bags, metal straws, and reusable dryer balls might not be high on the list for low income families especially when one-use disposable items come at a lower cost. Furthermore, common blog posts on how to get started with zero waste encourage newbies to go out and buy a plethora of items, a seeming contradiction to a lifestyle that vilifies consumerism (Tan 2019). Lastly, not everyone has access to bulk, plastic-free shops making the zero waste lifestyle much harder. As I have argued and shown that the ability for one to distance themselves from waste is indicative of social and racial privilege, reducing one's waste may not be a viable option.

When looking at those who are the face of the zero waste movement—Bea Johnson, Lauren Singer, Kathryn Kellogg—it is clear that the lifestyle is not inclusive. Those who model the movement are largely affluent white women (Tan 2019). Historically, women were deemed to be caretakers, and it seems women are at the forefront of this movement as they see themselves as the caretakers of the Earth; they have taken more responsibility in waste creation than their male counterparts. Additionally, minorities are often left out of zero waste talks perhaps due to the connection between race and socioeconomic status, making it harder for the majority of minorities to pay for the items deemed necessary in transitioning to a zero waste lifestyle. Overall, reducing plastic waste could benefit peoples affected by waste colonialism and businesses who harness trash as a weapon, but the zero waste lifestyle is not inclusive, as is exemplified in the most notorious zero waste influence.

Chapter 6

The University of Texas and its Zero Waste Goal: Football Games

The Powerful Players Involved

WM, the company whose website boasts "the largest number of landfills in the industry" is one of the main players and power structures in Austin in regards to waste (WM n.d.). As aforementioned, WM has used its power to acquire and expand the Austin Community Landfill several times since its purchase. Due to its ownership of the ACL and impactful presence on the east side, Waste Management is an influential, powerful force both within the city of Austin and across the nation. However, WM fails to recognize or acknowledge how its power to expand waste accumulation and who it affects has, and continues to, negatively affect the already burdened.

Luckily, WM is not the only powerful waste collector in Austin; Texas Disposal Systems, or TDS, is its number one competitor. More central to our story due to their partnership with the University of Texas, TDS markets itself as the more sustainable option. Their website draws this out, proclaiming: "Our commitment to diversion is evidenced by our fully integrated facility which incorporates solid waste disposal, compost production and recycling operations. We provide the highest quality and most environmentally friendly waste processing services" (TDS 2019). In contrast to WM, TDS focuses not just on acquiring and managing landfills, but also composting facilities, resource recovery locations, and even an exotic game ranch. Its placement of landfills is also done more responsibly as they are located away from residential areas where waste's aforementioned effects are lessened. The composting area, recycling space, and landfill where the University's waste ends up are located quite far south in a city called Creedmoor.

This introduces us to the last, and most obvious, power structure in place for this case

study: The University of Texas. While still capable of dominating the discourse surrounding what waste is and who it should affect, the university has at least used its power to form relations with TDS over WM. This more sustainable partnership ensures that, in the long run, the waste created by the university (here I choose to place the blame fully on the institution and not the fans usually credited with creating the waste) will affect fewer. The connection to TDS and its pursuit of a zero waste policy shows that the University of Texas is attempting to use its power to lessen its environmental footprint, but in the following pages I continue to argue that this ability to distance oneself from waste is a privilege and the university has not managed to escape the cycle of shirking waste's responsibilities and effects onto socioeconomically disadvantaged minorities.

What is Zero Waste to UT and Why?

The University of Texas has taken the idea of zero waste and applied it at the university level. In this section I continue my previous arguments: waste is defined by the power structures in place, waste inadvertently affects minorities and lower socioeconomic individuals, and the ability to go zero waste and/or lower one's proximity to waste is a privilege. We will now explore these arguments within the context of the University of Texas's football games.

The University of Texas's zero waste definition is:

> Zero Waste is the reduction of waste being sent to the landfill through both upstream (pre-consumer) and downstream (post-consumer) efforts. Achieving Zero Waste upstream can mean reducing the amount of disposable products purchased or changing packaging, while achieving Zero Waste downstream can mean diverting materials to the recycling facility instead of the landfill (University of Texas 2019).

While this explanation is used campus-wide, Texas Athletics Sustainability, a division within the athletics program, further defines zero waste as a 90% diversion from landfill. This denotes that zero waste isn't always zero. Nevertheless, this daunting goal is in place and has the potential to

affect students and fans alike. When I asked one of the athletics sustainability student coordinators why this goal was not truly zero, the blame was shifted to the consumer. They told me that what tailgaters bring in cannot be controlled, and thus there is wiggle room allowed in the goal. One of their major complaints was chip bags—non recyclable or compostable—but instead of blaming the companies that produced this waste the fans were criticized. This goes to show that even those working for the university and its waste goal have internalized the harmful rhetoric around waste put into place by the leading plastic companies—think back to the Keep America Beautiful Campaign—and corporations.

Being able to live a zero waste lifestyle at the individual level and escape this system of waste blame is a privilege, and it is no different on a larger scale. The University of Texas is able to work with companies, such as the local waste collecting company Texas Disposal Systems, in order to reach their goal. I do not believe TDS would work so closely with individuals, but with UT's money and power over the city of Austin, the university can work with other corporations to meet their goal. Additionally, the university has something to give; the compost collected is freely given to TDS, who can then turn this product for profit.

If becoming a zero waste campus could potentially negatively affect the experience of those at football games, why pursue this idea? One person working on drafting zero waste legislation at the university says "because the University of Texas produces a significant amount of waste per year...Landfill waste is expensive and environmentally destructive. Recycling and composting are essential for managing our resources here at the university, and everywhere else" (Hutchison 2019). Our planet is in the midst of a waste crisis: global recycling levels are low, China and other Asian countries have stopped shipping in other countries' waste, and plastics are accumulating in the ocean. While individuals do have an effect on this, the large fault rests on businesses and large organizations, although they try to shirk responsibility by distancing

themselves from the waste they produce. The University of Texas acknowledges this in both its zero waste definition and actions, and hopes to minimize their otherwise substantial impact through a zero waste goal and subsequent campus legislation.

The Process and the Structures in Place to Deal with Waste

In the scope of football games, it seems that the university is trying to accomplish this goal from behind the scenes. None of the people I interviewed or interacted with—some of them students—knew this goal was in place. Furthermore, none of them could identify any possible measures in place to support this goal, outside from the two differently-colored trash cans, one for recycling and one for compost. (This was largely unsurprising as consumers have been trained to sort waste in order to maintain the system). Those interviewed said they didn't feel their experience as fans were being affected in any way, especially since they were unaware of the zero waste goal in the first place. This is not to suggest that nothing is being done to reduce waste at football games—at times diversion rates have been in the 70% range—but, rather, to question who is feeling the effects if not the fans?

It seems the true work is left for the custodial staff, the student workers of Texas Athletics Sustainability, and those who volunteer with them. While the university does pursue a campus wide zero waste policy, the policy for football games is unique and separate due to its seasonal basis. There are dozens of full time staff members hired under the 'Resource Recovery' division employed by the university, and while some of these members can be found helping out when they deem appropriate, UT employs separate staff for the football games. The vast majority of this workforce is hourly employees. Additionally, there is a Texas Athletics Sustainability department which hires students in the forms of internships; these students are often sustainability majors seeking credit for their degree. Student volunteers also interact with waste,

although mostly escape game day responsibilities, instead offering their services the next day when trash sorts are conducted. With these three sources of labor, the University of Texas is able to still continue their pursuit of a zero waste goal while paying the majority of people for only part time jobs. This trash goal in the context of athletics is its own escapade, seemingly set apart—yet still factoring into—the institution at large.

During the games, trash is not to be seen by fans. In previous years, 22nd St. was shut down and trash bags were sorted on site in an effort to lower diversion rates and to teach and show fans about Texas Athletics Sustainability and the zero waste goal. However, recent athletics higher-ups have since outlawed this, not wanting visible trash to hinder the fans' gameday experience. Waste is not to be seen. The notion that this hurt fans instead of positively educating them is unwarranted and there is no data present to suggest that this was the case. Instead, it seems that those employed in positions of power internalized the definitions of and notions about waste issued by power structures. For example, one such notion is Douglas's connection of waste and dirt, suggesting that trash is in some way dirty or impure. Additionally, I harken back to Liboiron who thought about waste in relation to power structures, arguing that waste is matter out of place only because these power structures say it is so. Where waste is allowed to appropriately accumulate is decided by those institutions in place. In this case, these athletics higher-ups were able to use their powerful positions to determine where waste should be allowed to accumulate and who it should be allowed to affect. Apparently, trash does not belong in the middle of a shutdown street, even if it is being used as an educational tool.

With this decision made, trash sorts became more difficult to conduct. Instead of trash exiting the stadium and being sorted right nearby, it now has to be carted to a parking lot about a half mile or more away. This change shows us who is deemed disposable in the university operations. The hourly workers, in this case, are seen as less valuable than the paying fans, as is

manifest in the decision that waste should accumulate away from the stadium; those closer to waste are seen as less important. This executive decision by those in charge has increased the burden of waste for employees, but is said to improve the 'gameday experience' for fans as they are no longer confronted with the physicality of the trash produced during the event they have paid to attend.

Trash must be taken out of the stadium without interfering with those visiting the game. The lower level of the stadium hosts rooms full of trash compactors, gondolas full of trash bags, and trucks ready to depart to dumpsters. Of course, these things remain behind closed doors where non-workers are prohibited. When trash bags in the stadium are full, a custodial worker ties the bag—white bags for recycling, black for landfill/compost—and puts it in a large wheeled cart called a gondola. When a gondola is completely filled it is wheeled outside the stadium, usually around gate 27, and the trash bags are loaded onto a white pickup truck or a golf cart if it is early in the game and trash flow is low. When the game is nearing its end and trash accumulates quickly, the entire gondola is wheeled onto large trucks that resemble huge U-Hauls. It is also worth mentioning that a no drive rule goes into effect during time high foot traffic is expected. This includes 30 minutes before kickoff, halftime, and for 30 minutes following the end of the game. This rule privileges the fans, but makes working much more difficult as trash bags start to pile up. Yet, the goal is to ensure those with money (i.e. the paying fans) are catered to and can avoid the sight of a trash-filled golf cart.

If trash bags are becoming full faster than the trucks can respond the bags are momentarily placed outside the stadium. However, they remain behind a chain link fence covered in a black fabric to prevent visibility of what lies within. Again, the ability to see waste is perceived to be a hindering and negative experience for high paying fans; this nuisance is reserved for the hourly workers. Volunteers and staff are also taught that it is better to tie bags

off when they are half full than to let them get close to overflowing. While this seems contradictory to me in that this requires the use of more plastic garbage bags—potentially a form of waste themselves—the power structures in place have decided this is more socially appropriate for the hoi-polloi that attend football games at the University of Texas.

The loaded trucks then make their way to Lot 53 about a half mile away from the stadium, the first ones usually arriving thirty minutes after kickoff. Here, a parking lot with restricted use on game day weekends, are dozens of dumpsters placed in rows. Texas Disposal Systems, or TDS, has recently become a Texas Athletics Sustainability sponsor after providing the group with a sizable donation, and their signs can be seen on the dumpsters. The signs denote what each dumpster should contain: landfill, recycling, or cardboard. This also serves as yet another example of those in power making the decision as to where waste should go and how it should be sorted.

When the trucks arrive in the lot they back up down one of the lanes of dumpsters and the custodial and sustainability workers rush to unload. The bags are thrown into either landfill or recycling based on their color: white for recycling or black for landfill. Clean cardboard is wheeled over to the one or two dumpsters on the side, reserved solely for holding such waste. When the bags are thrown into their designated dumpster the truck heads back to the stadium and the cycle repeats. An average football game at the University of Texas produces 40 tons of trash, so this is no easy feat. Workers can be found at Lot 53 until 2 am. If it happens to be a particularly exciting, highly attended game—UT vs. LSU, for example—workers collect and sort trash well into 5:00 in the morning. This of course goes unnoticed by fans due to the separation of the lot and stadium; they will not see the rows and rows of trash filled dumpsters and laborers working around the clock.

On the day after gameday, Texas Athletics Sustainability and volunteers can be found at

Lot 53 to do a trash sort. Tables are laid out in rows and three bins are placed at every table: one for recycling, landfill, and compost. Gloves are placed on hands and volunteers are quickly taught what types of waste belong in each bin. Semi-catchy monichers are spread, such as "compost items are anything you can eat, eat off of, or eat with" (the plates and silverware in the stadium are, in fact, compostable) and "recyclable items are anything you drink out of." What waste goes into which bin and what will even be accepted by the waste collection company is not objective. It is yet another thing that is determined by the power structures in place. In the way that I have shown and argued that trash is only trash because those in power tell us it is, the same can be said of recyclables and compostables.

It is also worth offering a side note that having the ability to compost and power to transform 'waste' into a usable product is a privilege. Due to the expensive partnership between UT and TDS, the university has gained access to the resources needed in order to compost, a deceptively difficult process. To escape waste and its negative effects, one must have the socioeconomic concession to do so and the University of Texas passes the test.

Then, after the volunteers have been hastily trained and provided with gloves and the optional facemask, the dumpsters are opened and trash bags are placed on the tables to be ripped open and sorted through. On these days, TDS sends a trash truck specifically for collecting compostable materials. Not every single bag has the chance to be sorted through due to overall lack of volunteers and time. What can be sorted is sorted. When the day is done, TDS comes to collect the dumpsters of waste. Their partnership with the university proves quite beneficial as TDS essentially gets free labor and free product. Students sort the majority of the trash and TDS ends the day with a truck full of tons of compostable material.

While I would like to believe that TDS works so closely with UT for purely sustainability reasons, I cannot ignore that they also have much to gain financially with the aforementioned

benefits and the additional bonus of having their logo plastered on every bin, student staff shirt, and volunteer shirt. I have argued that the capitalist companies that hold so much affluence in this country want consumers to think of items as disposable to ensure they continue to buy more products. Here, I also urge the reader to consider that these same structures and institutions want items to be disposable and push for recycling and composting campaigns under the guise of environmental stewardship so that they can potentially turn this gently used product back into profit. Greenwashing and/or contributing miniscule amounts of their overall profit to 'eco-friendly' campaigns such as this zero waste goal ensures that corporations remain positive in the eye of the consumer while they simultaneously continue to evade the responsibility of waste reduction.

Nevertheless, once all of the forms of waste have entered TDS facilities and have been processed, diversion rate is calculated by weight. This includes waste from all game day activity areas, such as Tail-gate, Longhorn City Limits, Bevo Blvd and Smokey's Mid-way. These rates are then reported by their distinct waste streams; landfill, recycle and compost, and they are submitted directly to the Texas Athletics Department. If there are not enough volunteers to conduct a post game sort, the diversion rates are often in the low 30% range. During the 2019 season, the highest rates have been in the 60% range, although a diversion rate of 75% was reached for two games during the 2018 season (University of Texas n.d.). These diversion rates are not entirely at the mercy of the University of Texas's policies because it also includes tailgating waste. What fans bring in for pregame activities cannot be regulated without the university facing negative repercussions and hindering the fans' experience. A big instance of this are chip bags and styrofoam plates, both of which must go to landfill. The university has avoided targeting fans, but has created change in other areas.

Perhaps the biggest effort to reach zero waste football games took place in 2010 with the

creation of Texas Athletics Sustainability. The group conducts the postgame sorts and helps during game day with various positions, including helping in Lot 53 and tabling on Bevo Boulevard to raise fan awareness. Other efforts are in place as well. The person who created the group also got the university vendors within the stadium to switch to compostable plates, cups, and silverware. One of the newest efforts is a lid to go on the recycling bins in order to prevent non-recyclable items ending up in the wrong trash can. Based on my interviews, it seems fans pay almost no attention to these efforts, although this is better for the university than fans noticing and having a negative reaction. While the university could certainly do a better job promoting their zero waste efforts, I argue that fans do not realize these efforts and are not aware of the policies in place because they have the entitlement not to. They do not have to come into contact with waste, as the power structures have so meticulously ensured, and thus do not need to think about how to reduce its volume or effects.

Who is Affected by Game Day Waste?

There are those that have no choice but to be faced directly with these waste reduction decisions and their outcomes. This falls largely on the shoulders of the custodial staff, many of whom are hired on a game-to-game basis or specifically for the football season. Of the two times I visited Lot 53 on a game day—once for the morning/day shift and another for the night shift—I noticed that not one of the workers were white, and those asked chose to identify as black, African-American, or Mexican. As previously argued, those with the most visibility of, and interaction with, waste are minorities. Perhaps this is in part due to the association of waste with dirt and dirtiness. As Sundberg found a link between migrants and their trash, the association providing an image that the immigrants were dirty in some way, I believe similar work is at play in the waste industry on and around the University of Texas (Sundberg 2015). Dealing with

waste is seen as a dirty, unwanted job left for the desperate. Due to the multitude of racisms at play in the United States, that means these positions are often left open for minorities.

This racialized work is even more apparent when the workers' demographics are compared to those of the football fans. While I do not presume to know or be able to judge the races and ethnicities of every person in attendance at the University of Texas home football games, it is strikingly obvious that the vast majority of the visitors are white-passing. I also draw on the statistics of college football fans as a whole in order to strengthen this observation. Based on 2013 TV demographics, *The Atlantic* reported that 80% of the people tuned into college football games were white (Thompson 2014). In light of this, I return to one of the central facets of my argument: proximity to, and visibility of, waste is indicative of racial privilege. College football fans, who are predominately white, get to sit back and be catered to, while those who are left to work with waste are overwhelmingly—or in my observations, completely—minorities. The fact that waste work and resource recovery at the University of Texas football games is racialized fits into our broader discussions of recognizing what the institution and power structures in place value. One can parse out which racial groups are prized due to the physical link witnessed between waste and those in its vicinity.

Additionally, these workers have little socioeconomic power. When in Lot 53, one male worker talked about how right after his shift—which was going to end at 3 in the morning—he was driving down to San Antonio for another job. A different worker told me stories of growing up in Missouri, saying he "escaped the hood" and was now taking whatever jobs he could to make money. Yet another worker told me stories of his sister, a lawyer in Austin, and constantly emphasized her job description, linking her high-earning position to success. With his stories and comparisons, his own position provided a juxtaposition to the one of his sister.

These stories also serve to show how undervalued the waste workers and janitorial staff

of the University of Texas athletics department are. They have to work multiple jobs and undesirable hours to survive even though they are providing an essential service. Waste regulation is clearly important to the athletics higher ups as I have explained the various lengths they go to in order to ensure an orderly process that doesn't detract from fans' experience. Nevertheless, the pay is poor.

In the plutocracy that is the United States, value and importance can be perceived on the basis of how much one makes. Jobs deemed important (e.g. doctors, lawyers) come with high paying salaries. So why, despite the importance of cleanliness and proper waste collection, do these workers get paid little for their labor? I argue it is because those working in salaried positions for the university are part of the system that has the benefit of not having to worry about regular trash collection. Their power and position allows for them to push the burden of waste onto others, whose work and its value then goes largely unnoticed. In this way, waste collection and removal is a form of shadow labor, a term that is defined as "work that is absolutely central to the functioning and existence of a system but remains invisible within that system" (Hall 2014). Here one can think about how UT's zero waste goal serves as a sort of social ordering. The racialized labor I have emphasized upholds and performs duties for the system, but is kept separate (both ideologically and physically) from their white, paying counterparts in the form of football fans. The university relies on this work but renders it invisible due to its failure to fully recognize its importance. Our society does not perceive waste to be beneficial, and those who work in its proximity fall under the same harmful classifications.

I also find it important to recognize that those with the greatest socioeconomic power have the privilege of the lowest visibility of trash. In and around the stadium, it is common to see two standard trash cans: the blue recycling bin and the gray bin labeled 'compost', which is also used for landfill items. Yet, in the suites of the stadium where ticket prices are much higher, the

trash cans are different. They become less industrial and almost serve as furniture pieces. The trash cans have a nice, metal lid with only a small label to denote what waste goes where, and the base of the bin is covered in a sleek, black fabric. The trash cans themselves are less visible, blending into the other furniture, and the trash is also unseeable, hidden by the lid. The highest paying fans see the least amount of trash and its components.

When interviewing people, I asked if they saw trash before, during, or after the game, and almost every response mentioned the amount of trash left after the game ended. One interviewee mentioned the trash, but said that now that they purchase more expensive tickets and have better seats this is less of an issue, strengthening my argument that visibility of waste is tied to socioeconomic status. Another person interviewed said they believed people just left trash in and around their seats because they assumed someone else would come and pick it up. As fans, they had the affluence to not have to deal with their trash. They were a customer who had paid for a service (i.e. a football game) and once that ended they were no longer responsible for their waste or the area they had occupied and paid for. Instead, that responsibility falls to the racialized, underprivileged janitorial staff whose work is rendered invisible by the University of Texas.

The waste burden for custodians and the Texas Athletics Sustainability workers is worsened by the fans' ignorance. Not only are they unaware of the zero waste goal in place, they often lack basic knowledge of what is recyclable or compostable. When I asked people on Bevo Boulevard how to dispose of a used pizza box, over 90% of respondents said you put it in the recycling bin. This is actually the one place it should not go, the pizza grease making the cardboard unrecyclable. Rather, it should be placed in the compost or landfill bins. With fans not knowing what goes where, this creates more work for the Texas Athletics Sustainability workers and their volunteers, who now have more to sort.

The zero waste policy put into place by the University of Texas may not affect fans, but it

definitely creates more work for the members of Texas Athletics Sustainability and the custodial staff hired specifically for football games. Texas Athletics Sustainability would likely not have sort days if it wasn't for the university's goal. The custodians have lots of additional work to do in making sure the trash exiting the stadium and making its way to Lot 53 stays separated between landfill and recycling all the way up until it reaches the dumpster. This great care of making sure waste goes into the correct waste stream was not in place before the zero waste goal, and it makes the custodian's jobs harder. Some workers seem disgruntled by this, as Texas Athletics Sustainability students have noted times when the custodians will simply dump recycling into landfill bags to fill it up and only have one bag to haul to its proper location. As I have mentioned, this occasional negative behavior seems quite warranted due to the low pay, high effort, long hours, and lack of visibility and recognition the staff receives.

Additionally, it would also be easier if these separate waste streams didn't exist in Lot 53, where dumpsters must be labeled. Without a zero waste goal in place workers would not have to worry about ensuring the right bags enter the right dumpsters, especially in the case of cardboard whose dumpster is off to the side and quite inconvenient for workers to reach. Here we see how the major corporations at play have managed to put the work onto the consumer and minority workers, forcing them to play into the sorting system, much as they have managed to shift the guilt onto the consumer as aforementioned. In this case example, the companies who manufacture the items that will become waste—chips bags, beer cans, etc.—are far removed from the effects of waste while those who feel the consequences are the student and minority workers.

Despite this added workload to those involved, fans pay no price for the university's zero waste policy and the University of Texas continues pushing forward, hoping to ease the burden of our current waste crises. While this goal has certainly created positive environmental change,

the ability for the university to pursue such an escapade is made possible due to its affluence, socioeconomic standing, and position as part of one of the important power structures in place. Zero waste is not achievable for everyone due to its high cost and time commitment, yet UT is privileged enough to undertake a zero waste goal. The University of Texas has lessened their environmental impact through waste reduction during football games, but it is important to remember that in doing so they reaffirm the system that waste, and one's proximity to waste, comes down to socioeconomic standing and racial privilege. Furthermore, the university plays into the same, often harmful, definitions of waste that are a product of our capitalist society while also making invisible the workers who are so fundamental to waste reduction and the zero waste policy pursued by Texas Athletics.

Chapter 7

Summary and Closing Remarks

In this thesis I have set out to define waste and disposability, discover the ways waste is used to affect people, find out who is most affected by waste, determine what zero waste is, and examine the effects of the University of Texas's zero waste policy at football games. I have built upon the work of previous discard studies scholars by studying zero waste as well, specifically in the context of the University of Texas's football games, but more work needs to be done on this topic. Through participant-observation, semi-structured interviews, and textual analysis I have supported the following arguments.

First, we started with a definition, asking: what is waste? I argued here that waste is a cultural term and one that is employed in a multitude of ways by the powerful. What one person is ready to chuck in the bin, another may be ready to accept into their home as new. Additionally, waste is transient; it can flow from one category to the next. This is common in recycling, wherein something deemed to be waste is transformed into a new product thought of in a different light. Lastly, waste is physical. It takes up space and its physicality can produce a link between itself and those in its proximity. Simply put, I argue that those near waste come to be seen as waste. We see this in Sundburg's article *'Trash-talk' and the production of quotidian geopolitical boundaries in the USA–Mexico borderlands* which links immigrants and their trash, and we see this in how the minority workers employed by the University of Texas are treated, for example. Waste can't be seen outside of space because waste is that which doesn't fit into the system. Therefore, a system is needed for waste to exist.

After providing these definitions, I moved on to arguing that waste affects minorities and people of a lower socioeconomic standing more than their counterparts. To back up this claim I explored how environmental racism is alive and well in the United States. I went into detail on

the issue of Govalle Park, an area in minority-dominant East Austin that experienced illnesses and deaths due to old oil containers being stored in these areas. It was an area picked for this purpose because it is centered around a low-income, minority neighborhood. The same can be said for the location of the Austin Community Landfill and who the waste present there most affects. We also have seen that the University of Texas's football game waste is almost entirely managed by minorities.

In focusing on the socioeconomic aspect, I mentioned the link between race and class present in the United States due to racisms, especially institutional ones. I argue that those with more wealth and economic affluence have the ability to distance themselves from waste and its effects and find it easier to reduce their waste. Socioeconomic factors play a huge role at UT games for example, where trash is much less visible to those who pay more for their seats. The trash cans themselves are also different and less noticeable for the most expensive ticket buyers.

Moving on, I argue that the reason we have so much waste in the first place is due to capitalism. Capitalism requires low cost inputs in order to make the most profit out of an item. Furthermore, our consumer culture requires items to be turned out fast to meet high demands. Disposable items (e.g. plastic bottles) fit the bill and are thus mass produced.

It is not the companies that face the ramifications of waste creation, but the individuals, I argue. Waste has become problematized as we awaken to our trash crisis, but as individuals are the ones most seen creating trash, they take the blame. Corporations also have great socioeconomic power when compared to a single person, so they have a greater ability to affect narratives and policies on waste as shown in the Keep American Beautiful campaign.

From here I moved on to talking about zero waste and what zero waste can be. Like waste, zero waste is a subjective notion that differs for every individual or company that chooses to adopt the term. Some people hone in on the 'zero' while others, like the University of Texas,

provide some leeway and define zero waste as a 90% reduction of landfill material. I argue that being able to go zero waste is a privilege. Especially for individuals participating in this lifestyle, it is time consuming and expensive at first. Not everyone has equal accessibility to products, meaning not everyone is affected by waste in the same ways, and it is easier for some to pursue a zero waste goal than others. This is also true at the university level, with the University of Texas, as a renowned school, having the power to work with other corporations and businesses in the area to meet their zero waste goal.

In sum, we are in the midst of a waste crisis. Discard studies is an important field as the amount of waste produced creeps higher and higher each year. The Great Pacific Garbage Patch is only increasing in size, marine life is often found with consumed plastic in its stomach, and plastics—which take thousands and thousands of years to decompose—are still being produced at an alarming rate. With current socio political standings, Asian countries are beginning to refuse the rest of the world's trash and there are few solutions to this change. Waste affects everyone, albeit some more than others, so this is an issue that will inevitably consume us all. I call for more studies on zero waste as perhaps zero waste can be a partial solution to our problems. Nevertheless, by examining the root causes of our waste, what waste is, and who it affects, we can begin to understand this global catastrophe in a better light. In the very least, studying waste, where it ends up, and the rhetoric that surrounds it will reveal who is most valued and respected by the power structures in place

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